



# MILITARY

## Testimony of Erin Izen

Senior Director, Workforce Programs, The Home Depot

before a

Full Committee Oversight Hearing

of the

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

November 7, 2023

Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you for opportunity to testify before you at this hearing on The Impact of America's Businesses on Veteran Employment and Opportunity. As a military spouse and mother of U.S. Marines who have separated from the service, today's topic is very close to my heart. With me today is Haley Weaver, who leads our Military Relations team, and is also a military spouse.

I am the Senior Director of Workforce Programs for The Home Depot – the world's largest home improvement retailer. Founded in 1979, The Home Depot operates more than 2,300 retail stores, distribution centers, and corporate non-product facilities across all 50 states, US territories, Canada, and Mexico, with over 470,000 aproned associates.

We take pride in taking care of our associates. One example is the investment of approximately \$1 billion wage in annualized compensation increases for our front line, hourly associates that we announced earlier this year. We've been continuously focused on cultivating the best associate experience in retail, with ongoing investment in associate wages, benefits, bonuses, job tools, and career development opportunities.

This also holds true for the military community. The Home Depot is proud to be a prominent ally to the active military and veteran communities through our work in creating career pathways for transitioning servicemembers, implementing company policies to promote long-term career growth for our military associates, and improving the places veterans live.

We are proud that tens of thousands of our associates are veterans, National Guardsmen, reserves, and military spouses. You can often recognize them in our stores by the celebration badges on their aprons.



## Veterans in Retail

Retailers such as The Home Depot acknowledge the substantial benefits that individuals from the military community bring to our organizations - the list of reasons to hire veterans is long and supported by hard data. A report published in 2012 by The Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University highlights the exceptional qualities of veterans in the workforce. Veterans demonstrate remarkable adaptability in uncertain environments, exhibit higher levels of resilience compared to their non-veteran counterparts, possess expertise in culturally and ethnically diverse work settings, and actively foster improved collaboration within their teams.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the exceptional value that veterans contribute to the workforce and proactively implementing supportive programs and policies leads to elevated employee retention rates. Industry data shows that veterans not only meet but often surpass their civilian counterparts on crucial talent metrics. For instance, veterans exhibit equal or superior retention rates (91%), offer acceptance rates (92%), and interview-to-hire ratios (91%).<sup>2</sup> We also find that veterans acclimate well to our culture of service and inverted pyramid leadership approach.

Advancements in legislation have not only enhanced incentives but also introduced cost-effective measures for employers seeking to hire veteran talent. Federal tax credits such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, Wounded Warrior Tax Credit, and Credit for Employer Differential Wages allow companies like The Home Depot to claim millions of dollars in tax credits annually.

Approximately 1 in 12 veterans opt for a career in retail trade<sup>3</sup>, compared to 1 in 4 civilians<sup>4</sup>. Organizations like The Veteran Jobs Mission and U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring our Heroes program have made significant advances in driving awareness, but we still need strategic efforts by both government and industry leaders to increase veteran engagement in the retail sector.

## Transition Support Programs for Retail

Looking to our own company hiring, we value veterans' commitment, strong leadership, and decision-making skills. At The Home Depot, they can continue to be part of a culture that takes

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University, "IVMF in Focus: 2011-2012 Annual Report" (2012). Institute for Veterans and Military Families. 197. <https://surface.syr.edu/ivmf/197>

<sup>2</sup> Society for Human Resource Management. (2021). USAA Veterans Employment Study. <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/documents/usaa%20veterans%20report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Retail Federation. (2016, June 16). Military Veterans in Retail: A Sound Business Decision. <https://nrf.com/research/military-veterans-retail-sound-business-decision>

<sup>4</sup> National Retail Federation. About Retail Jobs (sourced from Bureau of Labor Statistics) <https://nrf.com/topics/economy/about-retail-jobs>



care of each other and makes a difference. In fiscal year 2022 alone, we are proud to have hired over 14,000 veterans into rewarding careers across our organization.

In 2019, The Home Depot partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes Corporate Fellowship Program, hosting our first cohort of military fellows supporting enterprise logistics operations at our Store Support Center in Atlanta, Georgia. The next year, in fall 2020, The Home Depot became an official Department of Defense Skillbridge authorized organization, rapidly expanding our ability to host transitioning servicemembers in DoD Skillbridge fellowship opportunities across our organization.

Since then, we have hosted over 150 transitioning service members in skill translation programs tailored to post-military careers in fields such as project management, cybersecurity, data analytics, supply chain, and retail management, among others. Officially known as The Home Depot's Military Fellowship Program, 12-week long cohorts are held three times each year. During the cohort period, The Home Depot's Military Relations team provides transition assistance training on what it's like to work in corporate America, and each fellow has a host team and veteran associate mentor to learn from.

I have witnessed the remarkable advantages that programs like DoD's Skillbridge bring to businesses such as The Home Depot. These initiatives provide invaluable early access to top-tier, professional talent emerging from the military, enhancing our workforce in unparalleled ways. Roughly 80% of the DoD Skillbridge participants at The Home Depot successfully transition into permanent associate positions. Graduates of our program have gone on to become cyber security analysts, software engineers, project managers, and are even senior leaders within our stores and distribution centers.

Carlos R. is one of many Military Fellowship Program success stories at The Home Depot in recent years. Joining our company through the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes program in Summer 2020, Carlos was hosted by a strategic operations team in the Home Depot Installation Services (HDIS) and was successfully hired as a senior analyst of HDIS real estate strategy at the completion of his fellowship. Since then, Carlos has been promoted to manager, and now leads his own team in overseeing Supply Chain and Network Strategy for HDIS. "I think The Home Depot does a phenomenal job of offering opportunities to veterans,"



Carlos says. “They mentor you, guide you and put you in a position to succeed. And that’s something I and other veterans really appreciate.”<sup>5</sup>



*DoD Skillbridge military fellows on store walk with Kelly Mayhall, President - Southern Division*

Building on the success of The Home Depot’s Military Fellowship Program, our company expanded its efforts to create innovative hiring pathways aimed at addressing the unemployment and underemployment challenges faced by veterans and military spouses while concurrently supporting the hiring of in-demand technical positions. Through our relationship with the Department of Defense’s Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), in the spring of 2022, The Home Depot proudly introduced its inaugural Military Spouse Workforce Management Apprenticeship Program. This initiative was designed to address the unique hurdles with career mobility encountered by military spouses, caused by frequent relocations. The apprenticeship was offered virtually and consisted of 12-weeks of paid apprenticeship training in skill areas such as customer service, issue resolution, and data analytics. Upon completion of the program, military spouse apprentices transitioned into full-time positions within The Home Depot’s customer care organization.

Additionally in 2022, The Home Depot launched a paid 12-week Large Equipment Military Apprenticeship program in our Rental Operation Facilities in Tampa, Florida, and Marietta, Georgia. This program assists military veterans in translating their experience working on hydraulic, electrical, or diesel engines into becoming a Home Depot repair technician servicing large construction equipment. Over the course of the 12-week program, military apprentices

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<sup>5</sup> The Home Depot. (2020, November 10). Military Veteran Spotlight: Carlos R. The Home Depot Foundation and Community News. <https://corporate.homedepot.com/news/foundation-and-community/military-veteran-spotlight-carlos-r>



receive tailored professional development training to enhance and refine essential soft skills, equipping them for success in their roles.

Furthermore, strategic partnerships with veteran service organizations and veteran employment partners such as Hire Heroes USA, US Vets, Work for Warriors, and others have assisted The Home Depot in connecting exceptional talent from the military community with our wide array of available career opportunities.



## Supportive Company Policies

When veterans put on an apron, they also receive a military-specific onboarding class, a veteran new hire coach, access to a veteran-specific resources and benefits, and an invitation to participate in one of our associate resource groups, including the Military Appreciation Group.



Our military associates are easily recognizable by the veteran and military spouse badges they can proudly display on their orange Home Depot aprons. Internal associate-led resource groups, such as the Military Appreciation Group (MAG), work tirelessly to ensure our military associates feel they are a valuable member of The Home Depot family, as well as educate non-military associates on the history and culture of the U.S. military. During Military Appreciation Month in May, Veterans Day in November, and additional holidays throughout the year, The Home Depot celebrates these associates with recognition events held in our stores, distribution centers, and non-product corporate facilities.

With less than 7% of the adult population having served in the military<sup>6</sup>, The Home Depot's Military Relations team developed and implemented required training courses for all Home Depot hiring managers, HR, and talent acquisition associates to ensure they know the value veterans bring to our company and can better understand their transferrable capabilities and skillsets. We also provide reference guides, generally translating Military Occupational Specialties (MOSS) and ranks to retail skills and common like roles.

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<sup>6</sup> Those Who Served: America's Veterans from World War II to the War on Terror; US Census Report. 6/2/20, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.html>



At The Home Depot, supporting the well-being of our associates is an instrumental part of one of our company's core values, Taking Care of Our People. Acknowledging the distinctive challenges and life situations our military associates face, we strive to provide them with the policies and benefits that they need to take care of themselves and their families.

In 2020, we created the Military Spouse Job Transfer Policy, a testament to our commitment to supporting our military spouse associates. This policy guarantees a job offer at one of our stores or supply chain locations to military spouse associates when they move under their spouse's orders. With available positions across thousands of our U.S. locations, we can simplify their job transition during military relocations.

Military Spouse and military dependent associates like Jessica M. have utilized the job transfer program to seamlessly continue their career at The Home Depot, no matter where the military sends their family within the U.S. Jessica, a U.S. Veteran herself, began as a part-time cashier in Poway, California, before relocating to a store in South Annapolis, Maryland, as the night replenishment manager. "In California, my husband received orders that we were moving in a couple of months," she recalls. "When I told my store manager, he was nothing but supportive." For Jessica, the store environment created at The Home Depot makes that military relocation process easier. "I love that when someone – like myself – is just hired, the whole store welcomes them into the family." The company values are another added benefit. "When I was in the U.S. Navy, our core values were honor, courage and commitment," she says. "When I came to work for Home Depot, I felt that the words were different, but the goals were still the same."<sup>7</sup>

Supporting our military spouse and military dependent associates who are impacted by an overseas military relocation, The Home Depot now offers them the ability to use the Military Family International Leave of Absence (LOA) policy, which provides leave for a period up to five years.

In a dedicated effort to stand by our Active Duty, National Guard and reserve associates, The Home Depot recently enhanced our Military Leave of Absence Policy. This update includes a substantial full-pay benefit for up to seven consecutive days, complementing our existing supplemental pay policy, ensuring that associates who temporarily step away from their roles at

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<sup>7</sup> The Home Depot. (2021, December 1). Store Transfer Program Helps California Military Spouse Move Jobs to Maryland. The Home Depot Corporate Newsroom. <https://corporate.homedepot.com/news/culture/store-transfer-program-helps-california-military-spouse-move-jobs-maryland>



The Home Depot to serve our nation receive the financial support they deserve while defending our country.

To assist managers and HR professionals with understanding military policies, we have a holistic military resources website, which includes easy-to-understand infographics and one-pagers, along with checklists and process maps for navigating complex situations, like requesting different types of LOA.

### Transition Support for All Veterans – Mission Transition

In July 2023, The Home Depot launched the first online guided version of Mission Transition, a series of courses aimed at providing U.S. service men and women with knowledge and resources to help them successfully transition into the civilian workforce. About 200,000 service members leave the military each year, but, according to Pew Research Center, only one-in-four veterans say they had a civilian job lined up after they left the military<sup>8</sup>. Mission Transition’s three self-paced, online courses can be completed in less than an hour and are filled with content, templates, scenarios, and language specific to experience from a military career. Courses include Optimize Your Resume, Build Your Personal Brand and What to Expect While Interviewing. There are even military-specific resume templates and sample interview questions. This program is available at no cost to the public and can be found on The Home Depot’s career website at [thd.co/missiontransition](https://thd.co/missiontransition).



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<sup>8</sup> Igielnik, R. (2019, November 7). *Key findings about America’s military veterans*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/11/07/key-findings-about-americas-military-veterans/>



## Transition Support Programs in the Trades – Path to Pro



There is a growing skilled labor gap impacting the construction industry. In addition to industry growth, tradespeople are retiring at record rates – around 40% of construction workers are expected to retire by 2031<sup>9</sup>. Today, there are nearly 400,000 open jobs requiring skilled plumbers, carpenters, electricians, HVAC specialists, etc.<sup>10</sup>

The Home Depot Foundation’s Path to Pro program launched in 2018 with a \$50 million commitment to train the next generation of skilled tradespeople and help fill the growing labor shortage in the U.S. The program and the Foundation’s trades-focused partnerships have introduced more than 200,000 people to the skilled trades and have trained more than 41,000 participants through programming available to youth, high school students, underserved communities, and separating U.S. military.<sup>11</sup>

The Home Depot Foundation’s Path to Pro military program, in partnership with Home Builders Institute (HBI) and SkillBridge, is offered on 10 U.S. military installations, including Camp Pendleton in Congressman Levin’s district. Over 3,000 transitioning service members have graduated from this 12-week program equipped with industry-recognized PACT and OSHA 10 certifications and ready to start a new career in the trades.<sup>12</sup> These servicemembers get hands on training, as well as partner with Habitat for Humanity to practice their skills doing home repairs for disabled, senior, and low-income veterans.

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<sup>9</sup> HBI Construction Labor Market Report. Fall 2021. [https://hbi.org/wp-content/uploads/HBI\\_Fall\\_Construction\\_Labor\\_Market\\_Report.pdf](https://hbi.org/wp-content/uploads/HBI_Fall_Construction_Labor_Market_Report.pdf)

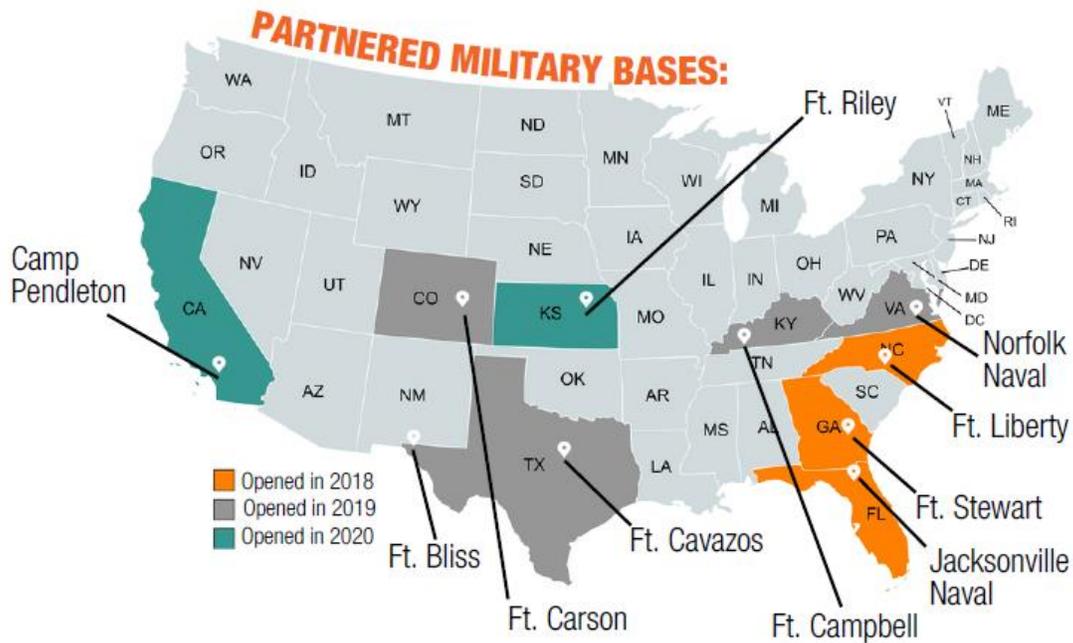
<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, October 3). Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<sup>11</sup> <https://corporate.homedepot.com/page/path-pro>

<sup>12</sup> <https://hbi.org/military/>

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When John P. made the decision to transition out of the U.S. Army, he chose to turn to the Home Builders Institute (HBI) Carpentry Program on base at Fort Liberty in North Carolina. Through the HBI program, he was able to learn the trade from the ground up, investing in his future success. After graduation, John accepted a post-military career with Habitat for Humanity as a construction site supervisor.



*Home Builders Institute (HBI) Base Partnership Locations*

To serve aspiring entrepreneurs within the skilled trades, The Home Depot Foundation partners with Bunker Labs to introduce an entrepreneurship program designed to guide U.S. military veterans and military spouses through the process of establishing a successful business foundation. During the 8-week program, participants gain industry-specific mentorship, learn about market segmentation, how to address specific customer profiles and design a business plan for launch. The program's virtual offering makes it accessible to participants nationwide.

The Foundation also expanded its Path to Pro scholarship program with grants to SkillPointe Foundation, its partner since 2021, and through a new partnership with Folds of Honor. Military scholarships through Folds of Honor extend financial support to qualifying veterans and military family members entering or enrolled in accredited skilled trade schools. The Foundation recognizes the importance of working with partners, like Folds of Honor, to expand existing training initiatives and establish fresh pathways to address the nation's shortage of skilled labor. By diversifying their methods through entrepreneurship and scholarship programs, they aim to

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extend their reach to more communities, offering free training opportunities and fostering lasting positive transformations within the industry.



Beyond the Foundation's work in this area, The Home Depot also helps veterans and others interested in the trades to start their career through the business-side Path to Pro program. Launched in 2021, Path to Pro has provided skilled trades resources, trades training, and career networking opportunities.

PathtoPro.com is a resource library available in English and Spanish, containing educational how-to guides and video content, training opportunities, and a variety of information on different career paths. Its goal is to help individuals better understand the career potential in the skilled trades. Less than 3% of young people are interested in a career in the trades, so there is a lot of work to be done on marketing trades as a lucrative career path.<sup>13</sup>

Our Skills Program offers free introductory trades training, available in English and Spanish, for those interested in pursuing or growing a career in the skilled trades. Participants can take advantage of on-demand content that gives them the necessary training to secure entry level positions in skilled trades career paths, including electrical, plumbing, HVAC, drywall and painting.

Finally, our Path to Pro Network is a jobseeker marketplace, created to connect skilled tradespeople to hiring trades professionals in the construction and home improvement industries. Skilled trades jobseekers can utilize digital and downloadable guides, available in English and Spanish. These guides help them create a profile, upload their resume, and add

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<sup>13</sup> NAHB Young Adults & the Construction Trades study. March 1, 2017. <https://www.nahb.org/-/media/DE91D89E4C8F4C1AA86239F9EBC3D55A.ashx>



photos of their work to network with The Home Depot's Pro customers for jobs in their area. 94% of Pro's cannot find the labor they need to grow their business<sup>14</sup>, so there are thousands of job postings across the U.S.

More information on all these programs, in both English and Spanish, can be found at [www.pathtopro.com](http://www.pathtopro.com).

### Improving the Places Veterans Live

In 2011, The Home Depot Foundation recognized the growing crisis with veteran homelessness. Since then, the Foundation has invested more than \$475 million in veteran causes and, working with our Team Depot volunteer force and nonprofit partners, built or improved more than 55,000 veteran homes and facilities.<sup>15</sup> The Foundation has pledged to invest half of a billion dollars in veteran causes by 2025, and I am proud to say we are ahead of schedule meeting that commitment. I am excited to note the estimated number of veterans experiencing homelessness in America has declined by over 55% since 2010<sup>16</sup>.

The Home Depot Foundation works to ensure safe, affordable housing for our nation's homeless and combat-wounded veterans. Across the U.S., there are roughly 3 million veterans living in inadequate owned housing, and 33,000 veterans who face homelessness on any given night. Additionally, there are more than 1 million post-9/11 veterans who have significant service-connected disabilities.<sup>17</sup> To address these challenges, The Home Depot Foundation partners with a powerful network of non-profit organizations, including the Gary Sinise Foundation, Tunnel to Towers Foundation, Operation Homefront, and others to build, repair and enhance homes for veterans. This includes temporary housing, critical home repairs, and accessible smart homes for combat-wounded veterans.

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<sup>14</sup> THD Consumer Insights Survey. May 2020.

<sup>15</sup> <https://corporate.homedepot.com/page/serving-veterans>

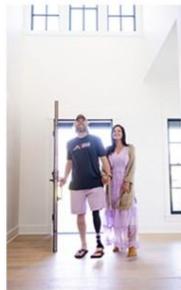
<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Point-in-Time Count. VA Homeless Programs. [https://www.va.gov/homeless/pit\\_count.asp](https://www.va.gov/homeless/pit_count.asp)

<sup>17</sup> The Home Depot. (n.d.). Serving Veterans. The Home Depot Corporate Website. <https://corporate.homedepot.com/page/serving-veterans>

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In May, The Home Depot Foundation teamed up with the Jared Allen's Homes for Wounded Warriors to build a smart home designed for U.S. Army, Staff Sergeant Chris Burrell, a military policeman who was leaving on a mission to support Iraqi police when explosives destroyed his vehicle, resulting in traumatic life-changing injuries. Overcoming the odds, after intense rehabilitation Chris returned to active duty to continue his military career until he retired after 20 years of service in 2021. To honor Chris' sacrifice and dedication, The Home Depot Foundation and Homes for Wounded Warriors retrofitted Chris' home to make it wheelchair accessible throughout, with zero-threshold entryways and exits. Lower and roll-under countertops and pull-down shelving allow Chris to stay in his wheelchair as he moves from room to room. The home also features a large main bathroom with a wheelchair-accessible shower.<sup>18</sup>



<sup>18</sup> The Home Depot. (2023, May 31). A Home for a Hero: The Home Depot Foundation and Jared Allen's Homes For Wounded Warriors Help Army Veteran Rebuild His Life. <https://corporate.homedepot.com/news/foundation-and-community/home-hero-home-depot-foundation-and-jared-allens-homes-wounded>

The logo features the Home Depot orange and white color scheme. On the left is the Home Depot logo, which consists of the words "THE HOME DEPOT" in white on an orange background, with a white star above the word "DEPOT". To the right of this is the word "MILITARY" in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font, with a white star above the letter "Y".

*SSgt Chris Burrel's Home Dedication Ceremony*

Together with The Home Depot Foundation, Team Depot, The Home Depot's associate volunteer force, improves the homes of veterans and helps communities affected by natural disasters. In 2022, more than 45,000 associate volunteers helped further the mission and impact of The Home Depot Foundation by completing more than 2,200 projects in communities across the country.<sup>19</sup>

One recent Team Depot project in Washington state celebrated and acknowledged local hero, U.S. Air Force Technical Sergeant Dan Fye, who was severely injured by an improvised explosive device during his third combat tour. In partnership with Semper Fi & America's Fund, The Home Depot associates upgraded several areas of Dan's home including a new outdoor space equipped with a gazebo, storage shed, a Traeger grill, tools, and lawn equipment.<sup>20</sup>

Each year, The Home Depot Foundation, through Team Depot, launches Operation Surprise, a campaign where The Home Depot associates will complete hundreds of service projects for veterans from November 1-20, honoring U.S. military veterans nationwide. Projects are focused on repairing and improving veteran homes to make them more accessible, more affordable, and more livable for the long run. During Operation Surprise 2022, more than 12,000 Team Depot volunteers completed over 500 projects nationwide, in partnership with our nonprofit partners.



*Home Depot associate and local Atlanta veteran during Team Depot project*

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<sup>19</sup> The Home Depot. Team Depot. <https://corporate.homedepot.com/page/team-depot>

<sup>20</sup> The Home Depot. (2023, August 9). Washington Hero's Home Makeover: Team Depot and Semper Fi Join Forces. <https://corporate.homedepot.com/news/foundation-and-community/washington-heros-home-makeover-team-depot-and-semper-fi-join-forces>



Since 2011, The Home Depot Foundation and Team Depot have volunteered 1.4 million hours of service to veterans, and built or improved more than 55,000 veteran homes and facilities, ensuring more of our nation's heroes have a safe, comfortable place to call home that fits their individual needs.

### Honoring Military-Affiliated Customers

The Home Depot honors those who have served us all by providing our military-affiliated customers with tremendous value in their purchasing. We are one of the few big box retailers that offer discounts to our military-affiliated customers, and we have been doing so for over a decade.

We proudly offer a 10% discount off eligible purchases. Recently, we implemented a registration process, which allows us to extend the discount to all veterans and their spouses every day and for shopping online, instead of just in-store and only with a current military ID. We now also include Gold Star spouses.

Additionally, we recently launched partnerships with the Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) and the Navy Exchange (NEX) to offer tax-free and special pricing on appliances and other product categories for military shoppers in their stores. We currently have showrooms in five exchanges and expect to have 60 more by end of next year. This special pricing on appliances is also open to all veterans online via [ShopMyExchange.com](http://ShopMyExchange.com) and [MyNavyExchange.com](http://MyNavyExchange.com).



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## Recognition

We are proud to have been named a Military Friendly employer, spouse employer, company, and brand, a Forbes best Employer for Veterans, a VETS Indexes 3-Star Employer, and a Best for Vets Employer by Military Times.



In recognition of The Home Depot's steadfast commitment to our National Guard and Reserve associates, we are a proud recipient of the Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award from the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR).



## Conclusion

As you can see, I take immense pride in representing a company that has shown an unwavering commitment to supporting our active military and veteran communities. Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today to speak on behalf of The Home Depot. I look forward to answering your questions.